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NEWS BRIEFS

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Holiday Messages to Veterans and Military Service Members

The public can share some joy by letting veterans and military service members know they are thinking of them during this holiday season. Sending them greeting cards and messages of thanks for their service are some of the ways of doing that.

A number of corporations and non-profit organizations are pitching in to help brighten the holidays for service members and hospitalized veterans. Here a few ways the public can send a greeting:

Let Say Thanks is program for sending a holiday greeting online. A person can send their personal greeting or one that is already prepared by school children by visiting www.letsaythanks.com.

America Supports You will send a holiday message to service members here in the U.S. and to those serving overseas. The public can post their messages at www.americasupportsyoudil.

The public can also send holiday greetings to veterans receiving care at Alabama's VA medical centers or at the state's veterans homes. The mailing address to state's veterans homes or VA medical centers in Alabama can be obtained by calling your County Veterans Service Office, or by visiting www.va.state.al.us or www.va.gov.

Traumatic Injury Protection Program Expands Benefits

Eligible military personnel with severe injuries will soon see improvements to the Servicemembers' Group Life Insurance Traumatic Injury Protection Program, known as TSGLI. The TSGLI program was created in 2005 to relieve some of the financial burdens on injured military personnel and their families.

After a comprehensive review of the program, the VA will increase the number of injuries, and will liberalize the criteria of other injuries covered under the TSGLI program.

Another important change to TSGLI is the payment of a \$25,000 benefit to service members hospitalized for 15 consecutive days as a result of a traumatic injury. This allows payments to begin earlier and financial help to be provided more quickly.

Severely injured servicemembers with TSGLI coverage are entitled to payments ranging between \$25,000 and \$100,000. Changes to the TSGLI benefits are retroactive to October 7, 2001.

Since the program began, over \$309 million dollars in TSGLI benefits has been paid to injured servicemembers and their families.

VA Provides Home Improvements and Structural Alterations Program to Disabled Veterans

The VA Home Improvement and Structural Alterations Program, known as HISA, provides funding for eligible veterans to make home improvements necessary for the continuation of medical treatment or for an eligible disabled veteran to have access to the home and essential lavatory and sanitary facilities.

For information on the program's eligibility criteria and application procedures, please contact the prosthetic representative at your nearest VA medical center or outpatient clinic.

Armed Forces Retirement Home Available to Eligible Veterans

The Armed Forces Retirement Home in Washington, DC, is a retirement community that meets the needs of retired servicemembers and other eligible disabled veterans.

The home offers health-care, room and board, activities and the camaraderie of other retirees and veterans. The Armed Forces Retirement Home in Gulfport, MS was closed after Hurricane Katrina, but is expected to reopen in 2010.

For more information on who is eligible to reside in these homes, please contact the Armed Forces Retirement Home's toll free number at 1-800-422-9988, or visit www.afrh.gov.

Distinctive License Plates Available to Recipients of the Purple Heart Medal

A distinctive permanent license plate may be issued to veteran state residents who are the recipient of the Purple Heart Medal. There is no tag fee; however, ad valorem taxes must be paid.

The veteran may retain the tag for life and does not have to annually re-register. Additionally, surviving spouses are entitled to retain the license plate for their lifetime. However, veterans desiring to receive additional Purple Heart license plates for more than one vehicle must pay registration fees and ad valorem taxes on the additional vehicles for which the license plates were obtained.

Please contact your County Veterans Service Office if you have questions about Alabama's Veterans License Plate Program, or need assistance in obtaining a veteran license plate.